

NNewsline

*Delivering Technology Access to
America's Communities*

Computer Literacy Helps Resident Maintain Job Skills

When Ether R. Jackson's employer, the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, purchased three new computers, it became essential that she learn how to use a new computer operating system and become familiar with the newest software applications.

Jackson, who lives on a limited budget, could not justify attending one of the high-cost computer literacy classes offered by many of the technical schools in her area. "My supervisor suggested that I look into taking the free classes offered at the Townview Community Learning Center. I decided to see what the center had to offer and have been going there ever since," she says. Townview offers a variety of programs for youth and adults, including a basic computer literacy class, a general equivalency diploma (GED) program, and an after-school program for youth.

Learning New Skills

An 82-year-old semiretired executive secretary, Jackson is proof that people of all ages can learn something new at a Neighborhood Networks center. She receives instruction from Townview's basic computer literacy program and has been a frequent visitor to the center for more than 2 years.

The training she receives at Townview provides her with the technical skills needed to excel at her current position as a part-time secretary at Beck. "I learn all types of new things on the computer at Townview, including Windows 98 and word processing skills using the newest software. I learn something new every day," she says.

After graduating from high school in 1941, Jackson, who had hopes of becoming a receptionist, attended classes at the Cooper Institute in Knoxville, Tennessee, to

Continued on page 2

CONTENTS

Computer Literacy Helps Resident Maintain Job Skills1
Recent Somali Immigrants Learn English3
Technology Buzz4
From Our Guest Columnist5
Additional Literacy Resources6
Fast Facts on Literacy7
Adult Participation in English as a Second Language Programs7



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Computer Literacy Skills, continued from page 1

receive formal training in that field. "At the Cooper Institute, I learned a variety of basic receptionist skills, including typing, customer service, and effective oral and written communication [skills]," she says.

While attending classes at the Cooper Institute, Jackson was offered a job as a secretary with the Knoxville Opportunity and Industrialization Center (OIC), a nonprofit organization that provides services to low- and middle-income Americans in the Knoxville area—similar to programs offered through the Neighborhood Networks initiative.

"We didn't have computers at that time—we used electronic typewriters instead," said Jackson. The skills she gained at the Cooper Institute allowed her to maintain her position at OIC until she retired after 20 years of service. At about the same time Jackson retired, the personal computer was introduced into the workplace and desktop computers began to replace typewriters, adding machines, and file cabinets. She had a keen interest in learning about the computer and all of its uses.

While Jackson was employed by OIC, the company had a close relationship with the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC). Like Neighborhood Networks, CAC offers a variety of literacy, computer training, and job placement

programs for adults. It was at CAC that Jackson first received computer literacy training. Part of the computer training offered at CAC included job placement. In 1990, with the help of a CAC staff member, Jackson got a job with the Beck Cultural Exchange Center.

History repeated itself nearly 8 years later when Jackson enrolled in computer literacy classes at Townview to keep up with changing technology. Since attending the classes, Jackson has become familiar with Windows 98 and achieved a good grasp of a number of word processing skills, including *find and replace* and importing graphics and tables. In addition, she has taken an introductory class on navigating the Internet. "At Townview, we try to get students to concentrate on learning skills and projects that will help them in their everyday activities," says center coordinator Kenneth Libby.

Since cutting back her hours at the Beck Center to 2 days per week, Jackson has become more involved in her church, where she is active in writing thank-you letters and creating invitations. In the future, she plans to teach computer skills to other members of her church. "I want to be able to teach others what I've learned."

Jackson thanks Neighborhood Networks and the Townview Community Learning Center for helping her acquire the computer skills needed to excel at her current job. "Since coming to Townview, I can do a lot of things I couldn't do before [on the computer]. I love working and love going to the center," says Jackson.

For more information on the Townview Neighborhood Networks Center, contact:

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NNewsline

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Recent Somali Immigrants Learn English

Recent Somali immigrants at the CWA Apartments and Cayce Homes in Nashville, Tennessee, are enrolled in an English language class and instruction at the CWA-Cayce Learning Center. The class began in early 2001 when the Metro Nashville School System contacted CWA-Cayce about holding adult education classes for the area's growing Somali population. Since then, the class continues to increase in popularity.

According to Rebecca Foy, center director, the class is full, with 20 to 25 students, most of them women. She credits this strong resident participation to word-of-mouth promotion within the neighborhood. Moreover, she credits the mostly female makeup of the classes to the Somali culture, which emphasizes the role of women as caring for the household. There is only one stipulation for class participation: Students must have lived in the United States for less than 5 years.

Assisting With Language Skills

The class places strong emphasis on learning basic conversation and speech skills rather than on writing, although writing is included. Although there is no formal skills test, class instructor Bonnie Myers administers an initial placement test to determine students' relative English proficiency. Course work focuses on basic survival English to teach the women simple everyday skills, and, more importantly, how to deal with school and classes.

As with many other recent immigrant communities, the Somali children are better speakers of English

than their parents, who depend on them for assistance with school as well as simple tasks such as going to the post office. "The children speak better English, so our goal is to see the adults succeed as parents, communicate with the teachers, and understand homework," says Foy.

ESL teaching differs from bilingual teaching, where students are taught using two languages. That approach is popular in schools in southern and western states where many residents speak Spanish. However, in a city such as Nashville, where the non-English-speaking population is not as large, it is more practical to assist students with their English language skills. English is taught in much the same way that small children learn to speak, through the labeling of objects and the practice of conversing.

In addition to the English classes, the CWA-Cayce Center also has a homework assistance program called Homework Club for children, including many children of ESL students. "We were really excited to be serving the population," says Foy. "It's a growing population in Nashville, and our goal is to serve everyone who lives here in our neighborhood."

For more information on the CWA-Cayce Learning Center's Somali English language classes, contact:

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518 South Fifth Street
Nashville, TN 37206
Phone: (615) 248-4029
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Technology Buzz

Job Searches and Online Training Resources

Neighborhood Networks center staff know that residents of HUD insured and assisted housing, whom they serve, need access to and use of the Internet—with its resources and information—so that they are not left behind in this technology-driven world.

Connecting tens of thousands of independent networks and databases, the Internet can help individuals locate information that can assist them in reaching various employment and personal goals. Therefore, having a basic knowledge of how to use this electronic medium is a vital skill for center residents.

The ability to locate, evaluate, and use the information—being Internet literate—is important when performing employment searches, finding online training resources, creating a personal job profile, researching a location, and finding facts on salary and company benefits.

Job Searches

Today, looking for a job extends beyond scanning the 2- by 3-inch columns in the classified section of your city's daily newspaper or standing in line at a local employment center. The Internet, mouse, monitor, and modem are buzzwords for today's job searches: you just click and search. Newspapers are not obsolete, just less innovative and somewhat limited. For example, they geographically limit a resident's choice of jobs, and this limits the speed of the application process.

The Internet is a welcome advancement in job searches. It has many Web sites that act as search engines, which not only help residents locate possible job vacancies in their own city or state, but also throughout the United States. Moreover, these sites will help residents create attractive resumes and cover letters, and sometimes offer a job agent that notifies them when a position that fits their qualifications becomes available. In addition, many Web sites allow an individual to apply for a position online. So, after locating a position, reading the various requirements, and

deciding that this is the job for them, residents can apply, and within seconds, an employer receives their resume or employment application.

The following are some popular Web sites for job searches:

- ◆ www.monster.com. Provides access to the most progressive companies and interactive, personalized tools to make the job-search process effective and convenient.
- ◆ www.usajobs.com. Lists jobs that range from big and small companies to public and private organizations in the United States.
- ◆ www.flipdog.com. Presents a comprehensive directory of jobs found on the Web.
- ◆ www.hotjobs.com. Offers jobs listed by company, industry, location, and salary.
- ◆ www.federaljobsearch.com. Matches a job search profile against its database of 45,304 U.S. federal government job openings.
- ◆ www.diversity.com. Provides job search and resume posting service for ethnic minorities, women, and other diverse candidates.
- ◆ www.ajb.org. Provides a searchable database of employment opportunities, created through a partnership between the U.S. Department of Labor and state and private-sector organizations.
- ◆ www.iminorities.com. Provides comprehensive job seeking and career management tools for minorities and women.
- ◆ www.washingtonjobs.com. Provides a database listing more than 20,000 Washington metropolitan area jobs.

Online Training and Literacy Resources

Because of the Internet, finding online resources for general equivalency diploma (GED) training and literacy has become faster, easier, and convenient. Help in finding a Web site, link, or information about a particular training program or literacy program is only a click away. If you need to develop a new skill, or if

Continued on page 6

From Our Guest Columnist

Barbara Bickham is a project manager/resident initiatives specialist for HUD. She is responsible for such special programs as drug elimination grants, New Approach Anti-Drug grants, setting up resident council groups, and working as a Neighborhood Networks coordinator. She loves the challenges of working with residents and seeking out partners for the initiative's computer learning centers. In this interview she discusses her involvement with Neighborhood Networks and its literacy programs.

NNewsline: How did you become involved in working with Neighborhood Networks centers?

Bickham: I loved the concept of the Neighborhood Networks initiative in empowering the residents that HUD serves. I have been involved with the program since its inception, and I am as excited today as I was when the pilot program was first set up. HUD's Ohio state office located in Columbus was one of the offices that volunteered to do the initiative's pilot program. I worked with the owners of Agler Green Cooperative to set up the first center for the Ohio state office. We partnered with organizations such as the Columbus Urban League, Columbus Computer Society, and Gahanna Children's College, which provided transportation for parents whose children were using the center's services. In addition, Ohio Hunger Task Force provided hot meals for the facility's youth. The computer learning center was the first official general equivalency diploma (GED) testing site.

NNewsline: What comes to mind when you hear the term *literacy program*?

Bickham: Children learning! I have a granddaughter, Jordan, and a grandson, Ty, who love to read, and I'm excited about them reading and learning. Jordan has been inspired by me visiting the Washington Square Center, in Newark, Ohio, and is now teaching her younger brother Ty to read. Anyone who knows me knows that my passion is children, and I am thrilled to be partnering with Columbus READ and giving



children the incentive and motivation to read on their own, and through this process, they can achieve all of their dreams.

NNewsline: Based on your experience, what do you believe are the steps involved in developing a literacy program?

Bickham: I seek out partnerships with established programs and see how their programs fit into the needs of the property. I determine how they can interface with our residents

and develop strategies and a plan of action. I work with the resident manager and identify which organizations, schools, or businesses are in the area and contact them by telephone or in person. I usually follow up with a letter.

NNewsline: Why is it important to have such programs for centers?

Bickham: Let's face it, people need to be able to read and comprehend in order to learn computer skills and seek jobs. There is a need out there within our own HUD housing complexes that has not been addressed. How we get those GEDs is important, but we haven't addressed how to reach those residents who are having reading difficulties. If they can't read they can't tie into the other programs. Presently, 118 students have enrolled at Southpark Neighborhood Networks Center. The students completed more than 6,000 hours of computer use. There was one GED graduate in 2001 and three students took the GED practice test.

Continued on page 8

Technology Buzz, continued from page 4

you want to refresh or further develop an existing one, the Internet can help you locate a variety of training programs and resources. Just choose one of the popular search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, or MSN; type in key words such as *online training*, *GED training*, *ESL training*, *literacy*, or *adult literacy*; then click and search. You will be introduced to a variety of programs from which to choose.

The following are some popular online training Web sites:

- ◆ www.trainingtools.com. Free Web-based instruction on software applications such as Access, Photoshop, HTML, Frontpage, and Dreamweaver.
- ◆ www.adulted.about.com/cs/testprep. Online GED preparation course.
- ◆ www.librarysupportstaff.com/ed4you.html. Free online learning site.
- ◆ www.edsurf.net/edfree/edfree.html. Online distance education learning resource for adult students.
- ◆ www.cybraryconnect.org. Free training in basic computer and information literacy skills, and access to GED, English as a Second Language, and literacy resources.
- ◆ cite.telecampus.com/GED/index.html. Free GED resources homepage.
- ◆ www.testbuddy.com. Online educational software to help users improve their basic skills.
- ◆ www.4tests.com. Online practice test site for exams such as GED and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). ◆

Additional Literacy Resources

Engaging Adults in Literacy Programs at Neighborhood Networks Centers

Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Multifamily Housing Programs, 2002.

This publication is designed to help Neighborhood Networks centers create literacy programs that meet the goals of adult learners.

To receive copies of this publication, contact:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Neighborhood Networks
2277 Research Boulevard, 5J
Rockville, MD 20850

Or call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at

Toll-free: (888) 312-2743

TTY: (800) 483-2209

E-mail: mail@NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Copies of this guide are also available for downloading at www.hud.gov/utilities/intercept.cfm?/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/resourcesforcenters/nnwguide031.pdf.

LiteracyLink

www.pbs.org/literacy/index.html

A public broadcasting initiative that links underserved and hard-to-reach adults and their teachers to quality adult basic education and general equivalency diploma preparation tools using technology. Using video, the Internet, and print materials, LiteracyLink created programs that are relevant to the needs of the individual learner, adult instructional programs, and the workforce.

LiteracyNet

www.literacynet.net/wplnforums

A Web site that provides Internet literacy and adult education listserv discussion groups. Individuals may subscribe to as many listservs as desired.

Continued on page 8

Fast Facts on Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy

- ◆ The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defines literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.” This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual’s ability to read—which is the more traditional concept of literacy. As information and technology have increasingly shaped our society, the skills we need to function successfully have gone beyond reading and literacy has come to include the skills listed in the current definition.
- ◆ Very few adults in the United States are truly illiterate. Rather, there are many adults with low literacy skills who lack the foundation they need to find and keep decent jobs, support their children’s education, and participate actively in civic life.
- ◆ Learning disabilities (LDs) include a wide variety of disorders that are thought to be neurological in origin and that affect one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Adults who have difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, or writing are likely to experience problems that significantly affect their academic achievement and their lives in general. Estimates of LDs in the general population range from 3 to 13 percent. Among adults with low literacy levels, the estimates are much higher—between 30 and 80 percent.
- ◆ More than 20 percent of adults read at or below a fifth-grade level—far below the level needed to earn a living wage. The National Adult Literacy Survey found that over 40 million Americans age 16 and older have significant literacy needs.
- ◆ Forty-three percent of people with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty, 17 percent receive food stamps, and 70 percent have no job or only a part-time job.
- ◆ Family income greatly affects a youth’s chances of dropping out of school. Youths at higher income levels are much more likely to remain in school than those at lower levels.
- ◆ Children’s literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers. Parental income and marital status are both important predictors of success in school, but neither is as significant as having a mother (or primary caregiver) who completed high school. ◆

Adult Participation in English as a Second Language Programs

(U.S. Department of Education)

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are the fastest growing component of state-administered adult education programs. From 1997 to 1998, 48 percent of adult education enrollments were in ESL programs, compared with 33 percent from 1993 to 1994. Of this 48 percent, 32 percent were enrolled in beginning ESL classes; 12 percent, in intermediate; and 4 percent, in advanced classes.

The 1994 to 1995 National Household Education survey found that the following barriers to participation in ESL classes existed among the adults it surveyed:

- ◆ Time (40 percent).
- ◆ Money or cost (26 percent).
- ◆ Childcare or transportation (23 percent).
- ◆ Other barriers not named in the survey (10 percent).

For the majority of adult males surveyed, time was the greatest barrier to their participation. Adult females reported childcare and transportation as their greatest barriers. Adults with less than a high school education reported that time, childcare, and transportation were their greatest barriers. Adults with a high school education reported that time and money/cost were their greatest barriers. ◆

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Guest Columnist, *continued from page 5*

NNewsline: What advice would you give to centers that are considering starting a literacy program?

Bickham: Find partners that have an established curriculum already set up. Why reinvent the wheel? The partners are also looking for people to interface with their program. I would recommend that new centers planning to offer youth programs should start immediately with the schools. It is difficult to get residents involved in the centers initially, but I found the personal touch works best. I have knocked on doors and tried to get as few as three really interested residents and work with them to chart out what is available in the community. I follow up with a resident survey. Also, I ask residents if they would attend the computer learning center if someone would babysit for them. Then they, in turn, will babysit while another resident attends. ♦

Additional Literary Resources, *continued from page 6*

Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc.

www.literacyvolunteers.org/home/index.htm

A fully integrated national network of local, state, and regional literacy providers that gives adults and their families the opportunity to acquire skills to be effective in their families, communities, and workplaces.

National Center for Family Literacy

www.famlit.org

An organization that focuses on meeting the educational needs of both children and their parents. Adult learners are faced with challenges that require them to solve problems, think creatively, and use interpersonal skills. The organization's adult education/English as a Second Language element provides them with opportunities to learn these and other skills. ♦